

Enterprise NOW!

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Saskatchewan's quarterly newsletter on people and business engaged in economic growth

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This issue we take a close-up look at Saskatchewan's Enterprise Regions, with more stories to follow in future issues. For a general overview, see our Spring 2009 issue online at www.enterprisesaskatchewan.ca/enowspring2009.

South Central: A One-Stop Shop for Business

By Shirley Collingridge

When Deb Thorn first sat at her desk as CEO of South Central Enterprise Region Inc. (SCER) in July 2009, she found herself in the middle of a one-stop shop where three business development agencies co-habit. Sharing the facility with Thorn and SCER are South Central Community Futures Development Corporation (SCCFDC), the Moose Jaw and District Chamber of Commerce (MJDC), and Enterprise Saskatchewan.

The organizations complement each other. By sharing resources, says Thorn, "We become more efficient and more effective. By working together, sharing information and expertise and avoiding

overlaps, this collaborative effort provides optimum results.

"Community Futures covers a similar geographic area as our Enterprise Region and often we deal with similar economic development, issues and community needs," she said.

Community Futures provides business loans and small business counselling while the Enterprise Region focuses on building our regional economy through strategies based on business attraction, retention and expansion. Both organizations work with the Chamber in support of entrepreneurship and fostering a

culture of enterprise and innovation. "This synergy helps make things happen."

In fact, Moose Jaw was recently named the fourth most entrepreneurial city in Canada based on the results of a 2009 Canadian Federation of Independent Business study.

Community Futures, the Enterprise Region and the Chamber all focus on youth involvement, leadership and governance, says Thorn. As Aristotle suggested, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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Front, from left: Evelyn Marcil, Office Manager, MJDC; Susan Elder, Client Resource Officer, SCCFDC; Adean Suidak, Economic Development Administrator, SCER; Deb Thorn, CEO, SCER. Back, from left: Corina Daradich, Office Administrator, SCCFDC; Brian Martynook, Executive Director, MJDC; Candi Galbraith, Business Development Officer, SCCFDC; Jim Dixon, Regional Enterprise Manager, Moose Jaw Regional Office, Enterprise Saskatchewan; Jonathan Eshun, Economic Development Officer, SCER; Les Mielke, CEO, SCCFDC; Barb Field, Information Officer, Enterprise Saskatchewan.

Photo: Keith Moulding

South West ER Plans to go Virtual

By Shirley Collingridge

As part of the effort to stimulate regional economic development through the Enterprise Regions program, the Southwest Enterprise Region (SWER) has undertaken something a little different: a bold initiative to be the first Enterprise Region considering going virtual.

A virtual office may sound cold but CEO Kelsay Reimer says it is all about the people. The concept makes sense from several angles, "geography definitely being one of them," said Reimer, "especially with winter travel."

Of the 13 Enterprise Regions, SWER covers the largest geographical region and serves a population of just under 44,000. While Reimer understands the importance of face-to-face sessions, "It is nice to have a mechanism in place where we can still meet with the board and our stakeholders," she said—neither rain nor snow nor sleet nor hail can deter virtual meetings.

As well, she added, "every community wants to have the economic development service located in their community. We wanted to be all-inclusive. We thought if we create this virtual office, we basically are located in southwest Saskatchewan," she said.

The virtual office will also save money without cutting jobs. In fact, says Reimer, the strategy "will create business growth and employment opportunities for people across southwest Saskatchewan."

A bricks and mortar office eats up funding through rent, but a virtual office does not. "I think in the first year, it will probably be a little bit more in terms of the equipment and technology that will need to be purchased, but in the long run it will definitely save dollars," she said.

The virtual office, while giving the sense of being a fully-equipped, fully-staffed storefront office will in fact simply be a website with intranet and extranet capabilities. Reimer says the intranet, which will host project management and content software, "is for staff and the board and I to share files, information, and conduct business."

"The other piece of the website will be the extranet for the public," said Reimer. "The public will be able to access information on who we are or what we are doing or to make connections within the southwest for business opportunities."

"Our mandate is regional in nature," she said, "I don't envision that I will be dealing with one-on-one clients. There won't be a lot of walk-in traffic for people looking for business planning—we would refer those clients to our counterparts with the Community Futures offices because that is really their area of expertise. Our focus will be working within the five strategic themes as outlined in the Strategy developed by the Board of Directors."

Reimer looks forward to broader options for human resources and tapping into that creative workforce.

"We will be hiring a few people to join the Enterprise Region team, and I won't be hiring based on geography—I will be hiring based on skill sets and areas of expertise that those individuals bring to the table."

There's a wealth of talent in southwest Saskatchewan, she added.

"People don't necessarily want to leave their homes and their families to move somewhere for a job but if they could

have that same job and still live in the community that they want to be in, that is a great fit. It may be a home-based office structure. It may be renting a small office from the town or the village wherever this person is located." A virtual office model provides this flexibility.

"We are hoping to have the bulk of the work completed by the end of February 2010," said Reimer. "That allows me to bring on the rest of the team through December, January and February so that they are familiar with the virtual office model, all of the technology and resources, and be part of the whole training process to assist in building an environment that is going to work for them too."

Reimer also briefly discussed the Fibre Optic Communications Network that SWER is leading and is pleased to see the region pull together for this type of project. "We have had tremendous buy-in from the entire region. SWER wants to be involved with projects that do not pit community against community or business against business and this project is a prime example of that. We want to be involved in initiatives that are really all inclusive and beneficial for all communities and all business and all industries. This project really does do that," she said.

"It really is a combination of everybody in the southwest coming together for the greater good of the southwest," concluded Reimer.

"We've recently hired a consultant to do the proof of concept for feasibility the fibre optic communication network project and look forward to keeping the region apprised of the progress." —SC

No Secret to Success for Saskatoon-Regina RROC-SREDA Project

During the next decade, about two-thirds of the province's entrepreneurs will be thinking about retirement. It's estimated that 10,694 small business owners, employing 167,700 workers, plan to exit their businesses in that time. If they are unable to find someone to take over the reins, many of these owners will have no choice but to shut down.

The Regina Regional Opportunities Commission (RROC) is partnering with the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority (SREDA) to offer a solution for this upcoming economic challenge. Together, RROC and SREDA have developed the Saskatchewan Business Succession pilot project—which aims to connect Saskatchewan entrepreneurs looking to sell their businesses with immigrant and Aboriginal buyers.

"We searched for similar programs across the country. When we couldn't find an existing succession model to work from, we built our own," said Larry Hiles, RROC President and CEO.

"Our succession model is unique because it addresses two challenges at once: keeping the doors open at existing businesses and creating investment opportunities for Aboriginal and immigrant entrepreneurs."

Confidentiality is often a concern with people who hope to sell their business, and the pilot program has been designed with that in mind. Formal confidentiality agreements are required from all interested buyers and sellers to ensure their interests are kept private.

"Confidentiality is key to this," Hiles explains. "As soon as people know your business is for sale, you're at risk of losing your staff, you're at risk of losing your

customers, your suppliers are going to be concerned and your competitors are going to be targeting you."

After the pilot project was announced on November 20, RROC and SREDA began soliciting businesses to try out the program. The partners are also engaging professional services providers including commercial real estate agents, accounting associations, legal associations and other groups representing potential sellers. RROC and SREDA also plan on working with the province's other Enterprise Regions to help identify potential vendors in their regions.

"The pilot program has a provincial reach, and for many of the smaller rural communities the need for a business successor is vital," says SREDA Aboriginal Business Development Manager Bernie Ness. "The need to engage various communities along with the participation from professionals is a key step in the pilot program."

The project partners hope that Saskatchewan business owners with an interest in selling their business will consider the pilot. There are no costs or fees associated with entering the pilot, and sellers are free to remove their business from the program whenever they wish.

"We see the pilot as another channel sellers can use to expand their reach to potential buyers," Hiles says. "We think that by connecting sellers with pre-qualified, motivated individuals from these non-traditional buyer pools, we will be able to create an environment where successful transactions take place."

For more information on the pilot, please contact John Waller (RROC) at 791-4699 (southern Saskatchewan) or Bernie Ness (SREDA) at 664-0728 (northern Saskatchewan). ❧



Larry Hiles (right) President and CEO of Regina Regional Opportunities Commission (RROC) poses with RROC Economic Development Officer John Waller.

Photo: Kevin Hogarth

A Solid Foundation for the South East

By Elaine Carlson

The Saskatchewan South East Enterprise Region (SSEER) extends from Kipling to the US border on the south, and from Pangman all the way to the Manitoba border. It is an economically diverse region driven primarily by agriculture, oil and gas, coal mining and power generation, and manufacturing and processing. The area represented by SSEER is probably one of the busiest, most diverse and prosperous economic regions of Saskatchewan, with the exception of Regina and Saskatoon, and has a very high percentage of business owners and entrepreneurs compared to other economic regions of western Canada.

Edie Spagrud, SSEER CEO, has been on the job and working hard since July. "We've focused on building our foundation before we get too heavily involved in projects," she says.

So far, Spagrud and her staff of two have already recruited 76 organizations in a membership campaign, organized a

grant and proposal writing workshop, and hosted an open house in December as part of a concerted effort to build awareness and forge relationships with municipalities, regional stakeholders and others.

The South East Enterprise Region also has its first elected board in place. "Early on, we initiated a process for soliciting expressions of interest from member representatives to serve on an elected board of directors and held our first AGM in October," says Spagrud.

"Governance-wise, the Enterprise Region is very well positioned for success, with a very dynamic board, high-profile leaders, and good regional representation. A full third of our board members are from the business sector, too, so businesses have been very receptive to the concept."

Spagrud and her staff have also begun a process to collect data specific to the region that will be posted on a regional

website and made available to the general public and prospective investors, businesses and industries looking to locate in the Enterprise Region.

In order to achieve this, Spagrud knows that she first needs to get the two cities, 35 RMs, 32 villages and 14 towns within the area engaged with the Enterprise Region. With that goal in mind, she plans to visit as many municipalities as possible in order to build rapport.

"We're also planning a number of seminars and projects that will provide some direct benefit to municipalities, such as land use planning and development seminars, facilitation workshops, and strategic planning sessions. Once we get more visible and have more projects under way, we'll demonstrate the very real value in participating in a region-wide network to further economic development." —EC

West Central: Mapping the Way Forward

By Elaine Carlson

West Central Enterprise Region General Manager Brenda Burton and her staff of four have been busy implementing an ambitious work plan—developing a regional profile and asset maps that highlight region-wide and community specific assets.

"We purchased software which enables us to place layers on a map of the region that speak to infrastructure such as highways, railways, waterways, water bodies—much like a version of Google Earth. It also lets us highlight oil and gas activity, health facilities, schools, sports and recreation, and other elements

specific to communities," says Burton. "That way, potential investors can look at our website and see where we have water, three-phase power, natural gas and all the other infrastructure needs potential investors would want to know."

The website also includes population numbers and other demographic information gleaned from Stats Canada Census data, including information on housing availability and affordability.

"The fact that there's a very youthful demographic in our region (about 75

per cent of the population is under age 55) is very attractive to investors. We also have an above-average provincial and national standard of living throughout most of our region," Burton adds.

Burton and the interim board of directors decided to focus on asset mapping for a very practical reason. "Research shows that more and more site selection pre-decisions are being made based on information available on websites. Now ours—www.westcentralsask.com—is up and running."

The West Central Enterprise Region

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also decided to open offices in Biggar, Rosetown, Kerrobert and Macklin in addition to the Kindersley main office to engage communities in the overall economic development effort, and to enhance service to prospective investors. Burton and her staff are also working on investment attraction strategies for within and outside the region.

The approach taken by the Enterprise Region appears to be both on target and on time.

"Although there has been a slowdown in the oil and gas sector labour market, we really haven't felt the recession here and continue to have a strong business

community," says Burton. "Many of those affected by the downturn in oil and gas activity have moved on to other areas that were experiencing employee shortages, so there's been a rebalancing."

Energy, agriculture and small manufacturing are the main economic drivers in the region. "Overall, we seem to be maintaining and growing investment already in the region, as well as attracting new investment," adds Burton.

A nomination process to select an elected board for the West Central Enterprise Region is slated for mid-January. —

"Many of those affected by the downturn in oil and gas activity have moved on to other areas that were experiencing employee shortages, so there's been a rebalancing."

Enterprise Region's One-Stop For Business Clients

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"By working together, we can do things we couldn't otherwise do," said Thorn.

"For example, through the sharing of information we were able to connect up two companies otherwise unknown to each other. We realized that one company's waste product might be an ideal feedstock for the other. We were able to bring these two companies together and facilitate something greater than it otherwise might have been. And even if it does not ultimately work out for the two companies, there is a lot of good that comes from facilitating this kind of collaboration."

Each agency has its own tool kit and it is this crossover which is most helpful, she added. Through a service agreement with the City of Moose Jaw, the Enterprise Region provides the community with economic development services. "Our excellent relationship with the Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce ensures that the many businesses they

represent have a voice in the economic development strategies that impact the local economy."

And this collaborative philosophy extends outside their four walls, said Thorn. For example, SCER works closely with the Southwest Tourism Association whose office is also located in Moose Jaw.

"Both our agencies are working with the Saskatchewan Museums Association on a pilot project involving global positional satellite (GPS) driving tourists into our more rural locations. Too few tourists have experienced the wonders of the historic Red Coat Trail, or heard the many stories promoted by the many museums and attractions along the way, stretching from Cypress Hills and Fort Walsh to the Grasslands National Park and into the Big Muddy. We hope this pilot project will lead the way for many more GPS rural escapes in the province in the coming years."

The SCER is building its regional economy based on the "hub and spoke" analogy, concluded Thorn. The City of Moose Jaw is the hub with the many communities that surround it—the spokes. Like a wheel, its function depends as much on having strong spokes as it does on a strong hub.

How well the hub and spokes fit and work together is just as critical.

"That's why our Enterprise Region stays focused on the larger commuter-shed area, towards the building of a strong 'hub and spoke' by facilitating new partnerships and on-going collaboration. Fortunately, the people who live, work and do business in our region have an incredible work ethic with a can-do attitude—putting our South Central Enterprise Region in good stead for the future." —

Enterprise Regions Collaborate in Corridor's Long-Term Development

By Shirley Collingridge

In the south end of Saskatchewan lies a veritable treasure trove. The prosperous Moose Jaw-Regina Corridor encompasses the immediate area surrounding Belle Plaine. At either end of the corridor lie its namesake cities. In between, lie the rural municipalities, towns and villages.

At the helm stand two capable captains: CEOs Larry Hiles of the Regina Regional Opportunities Commission and Deb Thorn of the South Central Enterprise Region Inc.

Hiles' and Thorn's Enterprise Regions are collaborating to develop a strategy that makes the already prosperous industrial corridor even more prosperous. The strategy, they say, will culminate in a sustainable, dynamic action plan that will facilitate opportunities in the region and guide the area into the next century.

The corridor already propels much of the provincial economy.

"Because the Moose Jaw-Regina industrial corridor is a driver of not only the economies of Moose Jaw and Regina, but of the provincial economy as a whole," said Thorn, "it really makes just makes good economic sense to optimize opportunities through a stakeholder collaboration."

"The corridor is probably one of the highest potential growth areas in the province for commercial activity," added Hiles.

Existing infrastructure promises to make smooth sailing for future developers. The area boasts the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and Canadian National Railway (CNR), a major highway grid including the Trans-Canada Highway,

an international airport in Regina and a smaller one in Moose Jaw. The CPR also owns the Soo Line railway which runs into Chicago—the largest transportation hub in the U.S.

Providing convenient access to all of the necessary utilities and infrastructure gives the corridor its competitive advantage. Existing major enterprises including Mosaic (potash), Yara Belle Plaine (nitrogen fertilizer), Canadian Salt Company,

"Each of those communities and municipalities have now experienced growth," said Hiles. Consequently, "they are far more attuned and prepared to try and get their communities ready for the future."

and Terra Grain Fuels (ethanol) are powerhouses shared by the two Enterprise Regions, with more developments proposed. As an emerging global transportation hub, the Moose Jaw-Regina Industrial Corridor is now a great place for major industries to establish or expand their business.

In addition, says Hiles, "You have access

to 25 per cent of Saskatchewan's labour force—labour is one of the key issues for any business now."

A 2005 Regional Economic Development Authority (REDA) study found stakeholder municipalities showed little interest in embarking on a major development journey. They are now on board. What has changed since that REDA study?

"Each of those communities and municipalities have now experienced growth," said Hiles. Consequently, "they are far more attuned and prepared to try and get their communities ready for the future."

Today those districts are beginning to plan whether they want to be bedroom communities, hosts to industrial parks, or something in between—all important components of the growth.

"Sorting out those decisions is a critical first step," said Hiles.

To become truly shovel-ready for investors, there is still much work to do. The Regions will need to synchronize zoning and bylaws. A watershed study must ensure there will be sufficient water into the next century. Ultimately, an Internet geographic information system could enable a potential wave of worldwide investors to easily access in-depth data about the corridor: existing transportation infrastructure, industrial parks, human resources, and pending development.

Finally, said Thorn, "our go-forward plan will involve stakeholders working together and taking action so the corridor is shovel-ready now and for the long term." ➤

Conference Hits Bullseye for Northwest Regional Partners

By Darrell Noakes

The Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA) couldn't have chosen a more opportune location for its fall conference. The association typically holds the annual event in smaller urban communities outside of Regina and Saskatoon, but the October 26-28, 2009 conference marked the first time it had been held in North Battleford.

The North West Enterprise Region (NWER), SEDA and the City of North Battleford partnered to bring the conference to the city.

"SEDA has never hosted in the northwest region of the province, and there's so much activity and growth that now is a great time to be in our region," says Denis Lavertu, Director of Business Development for the City of North Battleford and secretary-treasurer of NWER.

"We have great new facilities, as well as an opportunity to bring in some exceptional speakers. Pulling all that together just made a lot of sense, and we were quite excited at the opportunity."

One "exceptional speaker" turned out to be local product and multi-millionaire Brett Wilson, perhaps better known to some as a panelist on CBC's *Dragon's Den*.

"He talked mostly about the oil and gas industry, and opportunity for the future of power production," says Lavertu. "But this is his home town as well. He

sees so much opportunity not only for Saskatchewan, but also for North Battleford and this region."

"There was a lot of enthusiasm around the entrepreneurial potential of youth," says SEDA Executive Director Verona Thibault. "We had an engaging young speaker, 26-year-old Ben Barry, who started an international modeling agency when he was 14. That opening keynote and its enthusiasm were maintained throughout the event."

"We met some wonderful folks in North Battleford," Thibault says. "We were able to engage local and regional individuals from the municipalities and the economic development agencies. We had both mayors out during the municipal election. In fact, the mayor of Battleford, Chris Odishaw, being the philanthropist that he is, donated \$1200 on behalf of the event that we were able to give to the local food bank."

"We're seeing an influx of new people—a growth in population, in business, in

retail," says Lavertu.

Much of that growth is spurred by Alberta residents moving to (or back to) Saskatchewan, but also by immigration. "We're third, after Saskatoon and Regina, in landed immigrant status," he says.

"That's been a great success for us. We're also seeing growth in numbers and workforce participation with our First Nations groups. We've had some really good successes with First Nation employment in local businesses as well."

The conference's province-wide attendance provided one other important benefit, Lavertu notes.

"With the Enterprise Regions now coming on-stream, there are so many new people," he says. "That was fantastic—to be able to meet so many new economic development officers and new board members that attended from across the province."



MLA Darryl Hickie (left) and John Ondrusek, CEO North Central Enterprise Region, join Enterprise Minister Ken Cheveldayoff at a meeting with representatives from the North Central Enterprise Region in December.

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